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ABSTRACT

Afterschool programs enable inner city public schools to plan, implement, or expand projects that benefit the educational, health, social services, cultural, and recreational needs of the community. This study investigated the impact of afterschool programs on various non-cognitive and cognitive measures (e.g., attendance, suspensions, and grade point average) associated with school performance among poor, inner city students in Louisville, Kentucky. Community learning center programs were established in the intervention schools. They offered enrichment and support activities, community involvement, services to parents and other community members, extended school hours, and core educational services. A group of 636 participating elementary and secondary school students were divided into two groups: 241 regular program attendees and 395 non-regular attendees. Data were analyzed using descriptive, correlational, and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) methodology. Results indicated that there was a positive relationship between the total number of visits and improved school attendance. There was also a positive correlational trend between higher program participation and students' academic performance and number of suspensions. (Contains 15 references.) (SM)

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Outcome-Based Community-Schools Partnerships: The Impact of the After-School Programs on Non-Academic and Academic Indicators

Marco A. Munoz

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Abstract

The after school programs are critical for inner-city public schools to enable them to plan, implement, or expand projects that benefit the educational, health, social services, cultural, and recreational needs of the community. This study investigated the impact of after school programs on non-cognitive and cognitive measures associated with school performance. The participants of the program (N = 636) were divided into two groups: (a) regular attendees (n = 241) and (b) non-regular attendees (n = 395). The data was analyzed using descriptive, correlational, and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) methodology. The results of this evaluation indicated a positive relationship between the total number of visits and improvement in attendance at school. A positive correlational trend was observed for those students with higher participation in the area of suspensions and academic performance. Implications for educational policy and future research are discussed.

Keywords: After school education, after school programs, latchkey children, extracurricular activities, program effectiveness

Outcome-Based Community-Schools Partnerships: The Impact of the After-School Programs on Non-Academic and Academic Indicators

Accountability is one of the most important approaches to help the right use of collective funds in public education. Through increased surveillance, it is essential to insist that the scarce tax dollars are held accountable for the products they produce through some valid form of student growth measurement. According to Pinkney (1980), through an effective monitoring system, the general public should insist that all programs are capable of helping children regardless of their cultural background.

The popularity of performance-based accountability systems have grown since A Nation at Risk was published (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), with many states using standardized test scores as the indicator of school quality, building incentive regimes involving payment for results, and threatening state takeovers of poorly performing schools.

According to Nelson, Palonsky, and Carlson (1990), educational outcomes cannot longer be measured only in quantity (e.g., years of schooling and the number of high school diplomas granted). Schools and programs must guarantee that education has a demonstrably positive effect on students. The challenge facing district policy makers who are demanding high levels of accountability is to determine which accountability mechanism is best, in what contexts, and for what purposes (Whohlstetter, 1991). The overall objective of a performance accountability system is to provide a standard upon which a school can compare its own progress over time. The end results should (a) stimulate actions to improve education, (b) monitor regulatory compliance for state requirements, and (c) produce rewards as well as sanctions (Kirst, 1990).

Community Learning Centers (CLC)

The CLC program was established by Congress to award grants to rural and inner-city public schools to enable them to plan, implement, or expand projects that benefit the educational, health, social services, cultural, and recreational needs of the community. The following literature review examined the needs and potentials of after-school programs.

The Need and Demand for After-School Programs

Richard Riley, the Secretary of U. S. Education Department, provided the following facts: Over 52 million children fill American classrooms. Approximately 28 million school-age children live in homes with two-career families or single parents who work. After school, more than five million children spend their after school hours unsupervised; in come cases falling under harmful influences. Research shows that the dangers include the likelihood to use alcohol, drugs and tobacco and commit crimes. The dangers also include falling grades and dropping out school entirely. Law enforcement agencies report that the highest incidence of juvenile (ages 12 – 17) crime and delinquency takes place between the hours of 3 P.M to 8 P. M. (Riley, 1999).

In some urban areas, the current supply of after-school programs for school age children meet as little as 20% of the demand. In rural areas, the available school-age care could only cover about one third of the population of children with employed parents (United States General Accounting Office, 1997). As a result, millions of parents are concerned about their children's welling and desire for rewarding supervised after school programs.

Kanter, Williams, Cohen and Stonehill (2000) reported public polling data from the Mott JCPenny survey, 80% voters agreed that access to after-school programs in the community is important, and that this access should be available to all children, Yet, over the last three years, nearly two third of voters reported it is difficult to find programs in the community.

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CLC) program is a key element of the effort to keep children safe and help them learn after school. Congress has supported this initiative by appropriating $200 million for after-school programs in fiscal year 1999 and up to $40 million in 1998. This program will finance about 1,600 community learning centers in more than 500 communities to establish or expand school based programs that serve about 250,000 students after school, during weekends and summers (Richard, 1999).

The Potential of After-School Programs

An article released from the website of U. S. Department of Education (1997) commented that schools are the largest capital investment in most neighborhoods throughout the country, but many stand empty when traditional school day ends. People in the community are discovering that schools can be excellent resources for after-school programs for youth. These programs can include academic enrichment programs, such as reading tutoring and mentoring; and other programs, such as drug prevention and safety education. Posner and Vandell (1994) pointed out that in urban and low income areas, after-school programs are crucial to counteract the effects of a range of factors that can contribute to youth's lack of opportunities and ability to succeed academically.

According to An-Me Chung (2000), the after-school program can accomplish the following objectives: (1) Programs can keep children safe by preventing crime, juvenile delinquency, and drug and alcohol use; (2) Enhancing children's academic achievement by increasing children's interest and ability in reading, improving homework quality and school attendance; (3) Supporting children's social development by improving their better social skills, so they can handle conflicts more affectively, and cooperate more with authority figures and their peers; (4) Strengthening relationships between families and communities by involving parents and community volunteers in children's learning and well-being.

After-School Programs Makes a Difference

Kugler is a program officer at the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and liaison for the CCLC partnership between the Mott Foundation and the U. S. Department of Education. She described many successful stories of after-school programs as she traveled across the United States (2001). She said that there is an astonishing discovery that all children can learn and that the achievement gap is an artifact of students' limited experiences, poorly funded schools, and struggling families, not the result of low potential. The extended-day programs, with homework help, poetry and chess clubs, drama programs, field trips, and reading tutors, provided extra learning opportunities needed to help close the achievement gap. A recent 12-district California study indicated achievement gains for after-school students in reading that that were almost twice as large as the statewide increase and nearly as high in mathematics. A finding of this study indicated that those students who participated more in the after-school programs improved their scores even more (University of California at Irvine, 2001).

Kanter and others (2000) cited a study by U. S. Departments of Education and Justice (2000) that stated that principals, parents, community members, and state and local decision-makers want after-school programs because they know they keep children safe and help them academically. Children who regularly attend high quality programs have better peer relations, better grades, spent less time watching TV, and have lower incidences of drug-use violence and pregnancy. They also reported that in April 2000, grantees--through their annual progress reports and other sources—provided numerical examples that their programs are benefiting the children. Recent evaluation of other after-school programs also found improved school attendance, and reading and/or math scores or re-designation from the status of "limited English proficient".

The Components that Make After-School Program Work

Chung (2000) pointed out although there is no one single formula for success in after school programs, both practitioners and researchers have found that effective programs combine academic, enrichment, cultural and recreational activities to guide children in learning and engage them in enrichment activities. They also find that the best programs develop activities to meet the particular needs in the communities. Some common elements of quality programs include:

a. Goal setting and strong management. After-school programs should be clear about their intended goals. A successful program needs a solid organizational structure, accountability and effective management.

b. Quality after school staff. The staff should be qualified and committed, have appropriate experience, and able to interact productively with regular school staff.

c. Strong involvement of families. The success of after-school programs depends on the involvement of both families and community. Programs that include families and children in planning draw greater support from participants, families and community at large.

d. Enriching learning opportunities. After-school programs can improve children's academic performance and meet their social, emotional and physical developmental needs through structural enriching learning opportunities, such as art, music and drama.

In summary, the after-school programs are considered a necessity in our society for academic, social, emotional, physical, and safety reasons. They no longer just serve the privileged few who have physical or fine arts talents, or who come from well-to-do families. The after-school programs can serve thousands of students by providing high-quality extra learning opportunities and thousands of families in the communities by encouraging improved economic life and community safety. The CLC program has become a powerful model of after-school programs that demonstrates how school can provide expanded support for children and their families in the community.

Research Context and Implementation Check

The 21st CLC has the objective of serving children and community members with the greatest needs for expanded learning opportunities. The program is to be located in high need communities. The performance indicator is that more than 80% of the centers should be located in high poverty communities. In JCPS, all three centers are located in high poverty communities. A description of each participating school is presented below.

School A Elementary is located in one of the lowest economic areas in Louisville, which presents many challenges for both neighborhood youth and adults. School A has a student enrollment of about 600 students in grades K through 5. Approximately 90% of the students are eligible for free/reduced price meals and it is a Title I school. According to the Kentucky Department of Education report on the 2000-2001 CATS, School A Elementary students scored 42.4 out of a potential 140. In addition to low achievement scores, the attendance percent rate of the students was around 90% and about 27 students were suspended.

School B Middle is located in the heart of the Enterprise Zone in downtown Louisville. School B has about 700 students in grades 6 through 8. Approximately 90% of the students are eligible for free/reduced meals. The school is a Title I school. More than 20% of the students are participating in special education programs. In the Kentucky Department of Education' report on the 2000-2001 CATS, School B Middle ranked among the lowest of all the middle schools in the state with a score of only 42.4 out of 140. In addition to low academic scores, the attendance percent rate of the students was below 90% and more than 200 students suspended.

School C High is located to serve a large percent of the students and residents in the Enterprise Zone. School C has a student enrollment of approximately 600 students. About 70% of the students are eligible for free/reduced price meals and it is a Title I school. In the Kentucky Department of Education' report on the 2000-2001 CATS, C High School ranked among the lowest of all the high schools in the state with a score of 44.2 out of 140. In addition to low academic scores, the attendance percent rate of the students was below 90% and more than 300 students suspended from school.

After establishing the CLC in high need locations, the program offered multiple activities. Another objective of the CLC is that the centers will offer a range of high-quality educational, developmental, and recreational services. Using these performance indicators as benchmarks, this evaluation examined five areas of program implementation of the three centers and found the following results.

1) Enrichment and support activities. The APR requires that 85% of centers offer enrichment and support activities such as nutrition and health, art, music, technology, and recreation. All the three centers were found to have offered activities in this category (100%).
2) Community involvement. The three centers met the requirement in establishing and maintaining partnership within the community to increase the levels of community collaboration (100%).
3) Services to parents and other adult community members. It is required that 85% of centers will offer services to parents, senior citizens, and other adult community members. The three centers met and surpassed the 85% requirement, that is, the result was 100%.

4) Extended hours. More than 75% of centers will offer services at lest 15 hours a week on average and provide services when school is not in session, during the summer, and holidays. The three centers offered after-school activities on weekdays and weekends, one opened 15 hours per week, the second center 44 hours per week, and the third 15 hours per week. On average, the centers are open 25 hours per week, well beyond the required hours of service by the grant. The results indicated that 100% of centers met the requirement.
5) Core educational services. APR requires more than 85 % of the centers will offer high quality services in at least one core academic area, e.g., reading and literacy, mathematics, and science. Only one of the three centers offered the academic services during the first year of implementation. The requirement was partially met.

This study examined an approach to accountability that incorporated input and output variables. Emerging from this analysis is a set of design characteristics for accountability mechanisms at the district level that form an incipient theory about school district governance in education. The purpose of this paper was to examine the after school program and their impact on school indicators from an accountability perspective. The paper will address research questions that arise from the review of literature and the particular context at the district level. In the present study, data from all community learning centers in a public school system of a county located in Kentucky were analyzed to answer the following overarching research question concerned with program accountability: what is the impact of the after school program on non-cognitive and cognitive indicators such as attendance, suspensions, and GPA?

Method

Participants

For purposes of analyzing the information, the participants of the program (N = 636) were divided into two groups: (a) regular attendees (n = 241) and (b) non-regular attendees (n = 395). The criterion for classifying the groups was based on the mean number of visits to the centers (M = 4.08). Table 1 displays a profile of program participants on multiple socio-demographic indicators.

Table 1

Profile of Program Participants (N = 636)

	Regular Attendees		Non-Regular Attendees	
	F	%	F	%
School Level				
Elementary	88	36.5	138	34.9
Middle	79	32.8	126	31.9
High	55	22.8	108	27.3
Special Education	19	7.9	23	5.8
Race				
African American	186	77.2	314	79.5
White	52	21.6	78	19.7
Other	3	1.2	3	0.8
Gender				
Female	137	56.9	166	42.1
Male	104	43.1	229	57.9
Lunch Status				
Free	182	75.6	313	79.3
Reduced	28	11.4	37	9.3
Pay	31	13.0	45	11.3
Family Structure				
Single-Parent	182	75.6	323	81.7
Dual Parent	59	24.4	72	18.3

Instrumentation

Most of the measures used in this study are typically used in educational research. Exceptional Child Education (ECE) is the percentage of students who have a physical, behavioral or cognitive disability that adversely affects their educational performance. Percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch is the number of students who qualified for either free or reduced lunches according to federal guidelines. Mixed-parent household is the percentage of students whose households are not comprised of both their biological mother and father.

The fundamental dependent variable was attendance percent rate. Attendance percent rate represents the total number of days students attended school divided by the total number of days students were enrolled; the outcome is then multiplied by 100 to express the result in percentage. Suspension represents the total number of suspensions for the specified period of time. GPA is the proxy measure for academic performance. This measure is only available for middle and high school students.

Design and Procedures

This study was a typical case of secondary analysis. The research design was quantitative in nature, specifically descriptive (Gall, Borg, and Gall, 1996; Stevens, 1996). A sophisticated data tracking system (KidTrax) was used to obtain the name of the participants, the number of visits and the amount of time spent at the centers. This information was then matched by means of using the student identification numbers. The matching procedure facilitated the retrieval of information from the district's database. The information collected at the district's database included both socio-demographic and school indicators such as attendance and suspensions.

Results

An important element of this kind of analyses is to assess implementation measures associated with dosage. The first analysis was conducted to assess the total number of visits, the total hours spent, and the consequent average visit length to the centers. Table 2 displays the descriptive information related to these basic measures.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Implementation Measures (N = 636)

Variable	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Visits	4.08	3.64	1.00	41.00
Hours	12.41	11.75	.23	105.88
Average Length	2.93	1.23	.23	7.25

The second analysis involved examining changes in attendance for all students participating in the program. The same analysis was conducted with students identified as regular attendees and non-regular attendees. The criterion used to defined regular attendees was based on the mean number of visits (4.08). Table 3 presents the attendance data.

Table 3

Program Participants Attendance by Academic Semester

Academic Semester	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Full Sample (N = 636)				
Spring 2001	92.83	7.74	25.71	100.00
Spring 2002	92.58	7.29	40.79	100.00
Non-Regular (N = 395)				
Spring 2001	92.88	8.08	25.71	100.00
Spring 2002	92.54	7.64	40.79	100.00
Regular Attendees (N = 241)				
Spring 2001	92.76	7.17	25.71	100.00
Spring 2002	92.63	6.68	56.02	100.00

To further analyze the data, regular attendees with the average total number of visits doubled (8.16) were studied. This time a comparison was made between the advanced regular attendees with the rest of participants while controlling for initial differences in attendance rates. For this portion of the study, a univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used. The findings showed higher attendance for the advanced regular attendees when compared to the rest of the sample under study; the results, however, only move toward statistically significant levels. Table 4 presents the results of this analysis.

Table 4

Comparison of Advanced Regular Attendees and Non-Regular Attendees on Attendance

Academic Semester	M	SD	F	Adjusted R^2
Non-Regular (N = 534)	92.46	7.64	2.36*	.31
Regular Attendees (N = 52)	93.52	5.34		

* p = .12

Finally, to further analyze the information, a correlation was conducted to assess the relationship between average visit length and (a) attendance percent, (b) total number of suspensions, and (c) GPA. In terms of attendance, a positive correlation was found between average visit length and attendance percent for those participants with 8.16 or above number of visits (r = .28, p = .04). In terms of suspensions, a non-significant negative correlation was found between advanced regular attendees and suspensions (r = -.02, p = .86). Finally, in terms of GPA, a non-significant positive correlation was found between advanced regular attendees and GPA (r = .19, p = 15).

Discussion

The results of this evaluation indicated a relationship between the total number of visits and improvement in attendance at school. Although it did not reach statistically significant levels, for those students with higher levels of participation in the after school program, the impact of the program is positive. A positive correlational trend was observed for those students with higher dosage in the area of suspensions and academic performance. The higher the number of visits to the centers, the lower the number of suspensions and the higher the GPA. The association with academic performance measure is promising since the district under examination is re-focusing and expanding the academic oriented aspect of the program.

According to Chung (2000), goal setting and strong management are critical elements of a successful program. After-school programs should be clear about their intended goals. A successful program needs a solid organizational structure, accountability and effective management. This research was conducted with the objective of exploring an outcome-based accountability approach to the after school programs. Fashola (1998) argues that after-school programs must be evaluated to identify effective and replicable programs for increasing student achievement and other student outcomes.

Further research needs to address the limitations of this exploratory research. It is recommended to continue using the control group approach and the pre-posttest designs to try to address the threats to internal validity. A matching procedure on key variables plus the use of covariates might prove a valuable way to assess the differences between treatment and control group. Sustainability of effects and cost-effectiveness are other important research questions that need to be answered in future research.

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